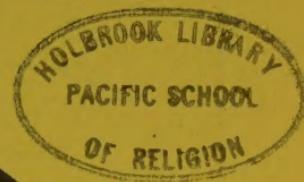


# CHRISTIAN DRAMA



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# CHRISTIAN DRAMA

edited by

JOHN HESTER

cover designed by JOHN PIPER

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All opinions expressed in these pages are personal, and are not necessarily those of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain

Vol. 4 Number 2

Spring, 1960

Published by:

THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN  
166 SHAFESBURY AVENUE, LONDON, W.C.2

Telephone: COVent Garden 3304/5

CHRISTIAN DRAMA: 6/6 per annum (post free)

CHRISTIAN DRAMA



*SAINT JOAN*

BARBARA JEFFORD AS JOAN, IN THE CURRENT OLD VIC PRODUCTION

(Photo by Angus McBean)

# GOING TO OBERAMMERGAU?

By THE REV. F. J. GLENDENNING

This summer tens of thousands of people—believers, questioners, unbelievers, will flock to the most famous Passion Play of them all. What will they find when they get there? In this short article I do not propose to examine the motives of those who go. They are undoubtedly mixed. (Carina Robins described them in *Christian Drama*, November 1950, as “hard bitten”). Nor do I wish to comment on the play, the production, or its impact on its packed and enthusiastic audiences. This is to be descriptive and nothing else.

Oberammergau is still a small town, neat, fairly prosperous these days, standing in the plain, not far from the winter sports centre at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, in Southern Bavaria.

For our purposes the story begins in the seventeenth century. Germany was devastated by the Thirty Years’ War, and in the wake of battle in 1632, the plague established itself easily enough in the filthy and insanitary conditions created through war. In the summer, the plague had reached the quiet hamlet of Oberammergau. Within a few weeks eighty-four people out of a population of a thousand had died, and many more were to die in the months to come.

The village council gradually came to the conclusion that this affliction was a result of human wickedness and so decided as a perpetual penance that one year in ten would be devoted to preparing a dramatic presentation of the Tragedy of Our Lord’s Passion, to keep before themselves the centrality of our redemption in Christ.

It is interesting that they chose a play. They were a creative community, already famous for their wood carving, and during the winter evenings often followed the practice of the communities in South Germany, by enacting some of the themes of the Christian Faith. Morality plays, the Corpus Christi procession and the rest were a normal part of church life and local community life. Frequently these performances and processions were excessively ostentatious, and thus in a mood of penitence it was appropriate that the village of Oberammergau should choose the Passion of Christ as the theme for their play. They made their vow with God in July 1633. From that time, it is said, there was not a single death from plague in the village.

In Spring 1634, the first performance took place. The text was the famous Augsburg Passion, written by the Benedictines of the Convent of St. Ulrich and St. Afra in the middle of the fifteenth century.

For many years this version, with a few local bits of adaptation was used in the revivals of the play. The village council devised a system which has been carefully followed by all succeeding generations. A committee regulated all proceedings, and parts were allotted by vote, according to talent and suitability. Only those who were natives of Oberammergau were allowed to take part. No records remain of the first performances, perhaps they were anonymous. The earliest text, which is in the possession of the famous Lang family, dates back to 1662.

For 136 years, the play was performed regularly at ten-year intervals, and as might be expected the idea “caught on” elsewhere in the area, often we

are told, to the detriment of the Faith. In 1770, therefore, the Elector forbade the presentation of Passion Plays in the whole of the Electorate. By 1780, the villagers of Oberammergau had plucked up sufficient courage to try again, and by insistence, tact, subtle argument, and a revised version by a monk at the nearby monastery of Ettal, obtained permission for their play to be performed again every ten years. It is at this period that we hear of the first mention of admission prices.

By 1801 they were getting into difficulties again. Political unrest made it impossible to hold more than nine performances that summer.

In 1810, a new Elector banned the play again. "It would be better to let your priest preach the Life of the Saviour to you, than to spend your time dragging him about the stage in your theatre". Eventually they rewrote the play and were recognised legally as merely holding a Folk Festival. In the following year, 1811, the play was performed again. This was the first time that honoraria were paid to the actors. So with a few slight adjustments, the play was performed approximately every ten years until the Nazi period. In 1950 the revival was a triumph and an act of witness in every sense.

So the play as we know it today (the English translation is a disaster!) finds its origin in the 1811 version. Up to that time the mediaeval play, with its crudities, had continued, more or less, to survive. I quote from *Oberammergau and its Passion Play* by E. H. C. Corathiel:

"Right through the eighteenth century the Crucifixion Scene continued to be carried out with horrible minuteness. Small boys who took the parts of demons particularly looked forward to the place where Judas, having hanged himself in the presence of the High Council, was disembowelled and dragged off to Hell. In accordance with stage instructions the attendant devils would fall upon the entrails and devour them. As they were made of pancake batter, fried and sweetened, the little imps enjoyed this part of the performance immensely!"

They required "something more dignified and human than this, something that had sprung from the soil, and that would suit both the rugged landscape and their own natural reactions to the Biblical story". The text of 1811 by Ottmar Weis, with later revisions by Alois Daisenberger, both local priests, and the music by Rochus Dedler, has remained. As long ago as 1886, there was an attempt to revise the play, and the music. This was planned for 1940, but never took place for obvious reasons.

It takes roughly two years to prepare a production from elections to the parts, to the actual performances. Usually during the previous summer to the production, a series of performances of "practice plays" are prepared. These give people an opportunity of forming judgements about individual actors, prior to the ultimate casting. A committee headed by the Burgo-master is responsible not only for arrangements in relation to the production, but also with the tourist influx. Arrangements must be made for their comfort.

The vast stage itself is open to air and sky, and is large enough to hold hundreds of actors. The auditorium is covered, and contains 5,500 seats.

The play itself is based on a blend of Old and New Testament. It begins with the Entry into Jerusalem, and then follow a series of Old Testament tableaux set in contrast to the unfolding of the Passion narrative. For the Biblical scholar, these "contrasts" are arbitrary, e.g., Joseph sold into

captivity, in relation to the conviction of Christ by the Sanhedrin; or Tobias taking leave of his parents, and the Bride in the Song of Songs, in relation to Christ weeping over Jerusalem and Judas agreeing to betray him. This is artificial as a method in the period of Biblical criticism, but it has to be accepted as an early nineteenth-century conception. The play proceeds throughout the whole day along the royal progress to Calvary and the climax is the crucifixion itself. I have not seen the performance and therefore it is difficult to tell how the glory of the resurrection and ascension are conveyed, in the two short scenes that close the play.

The impact is inevitable. Oberammergau has become an international event, and therefore it communicates powerfully still. The continued intense experience of a large audience, the babel of languages in the interval, and the continual air of expectancy and common purpose in the village, all contribute to "the Oberammergau experience". Some may be critical of the tourist industry in the village whose thoughts are not only centred on the Passion of Christ. Perhaps this is inevitable. But for most it does not mar an experience that will be treasured for the rest of one's life. The Gospel is proclaimed and the cost of human sin to the Lord Christ is made manifest. Let those that have ears to hear let them hear.

## THEATRE GROUP PRODUCTIONS

By PETER ALBERY

Originally Drama was the friend, close associate and interpreter of Religion. It has, since the golden age of Greece, been instrumental in developing man's concept of God and his belief in a universe formed, not by the hand of chance to end in self-destruction, but for a noble and predestined purpose.

In England, however, in the seventeenth century Church and Stage became estranged. This estrangement, which was detrimental to them both, has continued to the present day, when a great number of commercial theatres are harnessed, willingly or unwillingly, to meet the demand of the lowest common denominator for salacious sex, thrills and spoon-fed laughter.

This would not be so injurious to the spiritual health of the nation if a theatre with a true sense of values in relation to man was in being. Unfortunately, despite the achievements of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain and of such individuals as the late Dr. Bell, Martin Browne and others, there is still no centre for Religious Drama, nor a supply of suitable and worth-while plays.

The aims of Theatre Group Productions are:

1. Through the medium of Religious Drama to encourage us the better to face and comprehend the spiritual issues of our time.
2. To establish a centre for such drama in London, with a yearly Festival.

Since the formation of Theatre Group Productions, it has become clear that the group might provide a valuable link between the professional theatre, the R.D.S. of G.B., and the numerous associations of Christian Churches already existing in and around London.

Further particulars can be obtained from me: Peter Albery, 7a Lyndhurst Terrace, London, N.W. 3.

# “A STRANGE COMING”

By JAMES FORSYTH

This is a new play which presents a set of contemporary characters struggling with a set of contemporary problems, against the timeless background of the festival of Christmas. It is therefore a kind of nativity play, but it operates with the technique of a Morality play. The drama of the birth of Christ comes secondary to the comment on modern life. It is a thought-provoker and, very rightly I think, the production under review had the flavour of “living newspaper” presentation. The main daemonic controller of the action within the play is in fact a newspaper reporter.

Now, before facing the problem that this sort of play always raises—a kind of courtship with the courtesans of Propaganda who never have any honest relation to the muse of Drama and are seldom fit subjects for the marriage of Truth and Art—let me say that a feeling of challenge was the hall-mark of the event when the play was presented at St. Stephen’s Church hall in Hampstead. I think I am right in saying that it was specially written for Theatre Group Productions, who presented it and who have a close association with this church. It was written by one of the founder members of the Group who is professionally both writer and actress—Sylvia Read—and at the performance upon which this review is based it was clear how a whole sense of challenge was affecting not only the large audience but the vicar and the general life of that church. In other words it was doing a job of stimulating spirit within a Christian community. I say this not to beg the question of artistic criticism of the play but to make the point that in terms of real success it was fulfilling what I would consider it set out to do.

Now, to the particular play and the typical dangers. The play is something like this: A group of unrelated pairs of people are thrown together for an hour or two on Christmas Eve, by various dislocations of their Christmas journeys. This happens in “a valley somewhere in the English countryside”. Two pairs are already in the news—an American film star and her new husband; a juvenile delinquent and his mother, a local widow. This brings the newspaper reporter on the scene and, for the purposes of making a better news story out of the whole situation he takes a special “slant” on The Christmas Story. As they all have to gravitate towards the hospitality of the local inn, he gets them to confess what they—as modern Magi—would present as their particular gift if they were in fact proceeding towards the inn where the Christ child had been born.

As a Morality, this is the original essence of the play. The gifts are such “gifts of the spirit” that their declaration completely disrupts and destroys the reporter’s daemonic design to make a stunt out of Christmas. In other words the timeless thing has an inevitable depth of meaning which breaks through the crust of even a modern mimicry of it. Here is a fine and relevant subject matter. And, where it seizes it, so is the play real, and fine. My reservations are with the shallowness of the “crust”.

If you challenge Life—capital “L”—it is absolutely essential to remember that there you are—in it, living it. If for the purposes of making a comment upon “Life as it is lived” you present Life in terms that are superficially conceived and assumedly distant from you, the challenge taken up is too easi-

and too likely to lead to a victory smacking of smugness. Here, surely, is a large danger in all Christian Drama: that presupposition of superiority which, within an Art, can righteously create all the worst horrors of Propaganda. I think perhaps that, in the face of this danger, the Christian dramatist might advisedly measure all triumphs-via-drama against the fact that at the heart of the Christian belief lies recurrent tragedy triumphant; not an undivine comedy in which the chosen can afford to smile.

This is not to say that *A Strange Coming* falls into that depth of that danger. Not at all. There is a scene in which the estranged parties to a marriage meet and the whole business of responsibility towards their tragic child is faced at a level which is real and deep. There is a scene where a young girl, in her over-enthusiasm for life after a decision *not* to commit suicide, deals with a commercial traveller the melancholic treasure of whose life is a travelling bag filled with years of unopened letters. And here there is both a comic and a profound comment on life. In fact, I think that Mr. Possum is a real kind of Morality character. In other cases such as Paulina, the widowed mother of the juvenile criminal, the characterisation seems too shallow. Of course, it is obvious that in a Morality Play characterisation must seem to be according to type. But, if the appreciation of type is not universal enough in its relation to life, your audience can be left with a caricature of an already established type. We are a little inclined to believe that all the types have already been established. This is just not true. "Duchess," the "Hollywood Film Star," is just a type of a type, but Mr. Possum, I—personally—felt pleased to meet for the first time ever; and Hermione looked as if she had arrived newly.

There are thirteen characters on the cast list, but the number of players was three: Sylvia Read playing six with great dexterity, William Fry playing six, with a talent that must have delighted his authoress and certainly delighted his audience. And, in a part that had to be common to many scenes, Loy Mostyn, played the reporter with a real integrity to the whole manner of the production. That this feat, of playing six characters each, was so successfully carried out reflects well not only on the players but on the player-authoress, that technically she could make this possible. Out of the challenge of this sort of problem, John Downing made an imaginatively vivid and simple production which was completely effective.

I understand that it is not intended that the play should as a rule be played by this limited number, but it puts it in an interesting category, technically, that it can be played by any number from three to thirteen. There are points in favour of both ends of the scale, and the fact that two people were playing all parts but one, and the audience had accepted this "game", rescued the final "Mary-Joseph" scene from something verging on artistic disaster. For, suddenly to bring the presence of that event into that perspective was, I think, to risk giving it the values of the thing under attack by this play—Life lived without reference to the deep and the real.

# “THE UNQUIET JOURNEY”

By the REV. RONALD AYRES

A collection of prose and poetry, spoken by Sylvia Read and John Downing

*(Theatre Group Productions)*

The programme was divided into four sections: In Praise; Intimations of God; The Word made Flesh; The Destination of Man.

This was an evening on which I wished that several acquaintances who find poetry “dull” or beyond them could have been present, for here were words excitingly brought to life, and given their full beauty and meaning. In a programme of such variety and length, each person will find old favourites, and make new discoveries. For myself some well known poems gained new depth. Amongst them, Blake’s *Lamb*, Dekker’s *Sweet Content* and Tennyson’s *Flower in the Crannied Wall*. New things I was grateful for were *The Effigy of a Nun* by Sara Teasdale, and Evelyn Underhill’s *Immanence*.

Here was humour, in, for example, Betjeman’s *Diary of a Church Mouse*; bursting joy in *Hey Nonny No!* and Herbert’s *Praise*. The two speakers were at home in dialect, and Yeats’ *Fiddler of Dooney*, was almost too Irish for the acoustics of Holy Trinity.

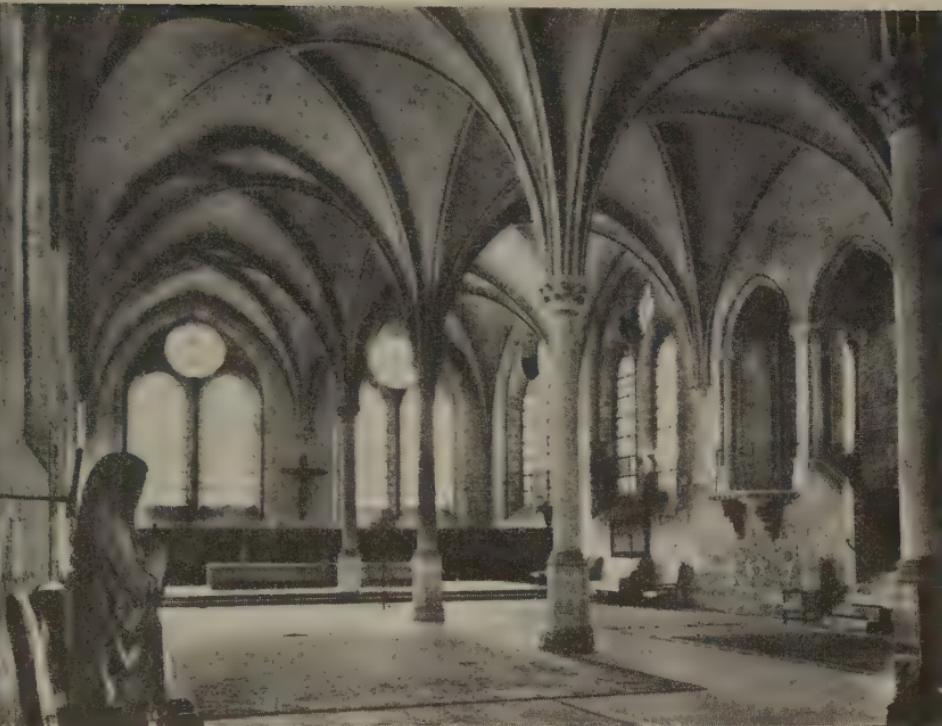
There are bound to be personal blank spots in such an evening. I would rather read than hear the section of *The Rock*. It is almost too concise in thought to follow as it is spoken, especially as a considerable amount of mental gymnastics is necessary in any case to cope with the richness and variety of the programme. The one dramatic dialogue for some reason did not fare well. Edwin Muir’s poems, although good in themselves did not supply me with the climax I wanted to go home on. But these are quibbles, and others will feel quite differently. Such is the way of words.

My own sincere thanks to Sylvia Read and John Downing for bringing poetry to life, and for opening some of the treasures that lie within covers and sit on shelves.

The production was excellent, from the entry with the masks, through the positioning for each item, to the bow at the altar. The ability of both readers to change rapidly from mood to mood, taking us with them, their perfect diction and unerring emphasis in a poem call forth our admiration and our thanks. There were times when I wanted to cry “Stop”, and have time to think of an item and digest its mood and thought before being whisked elsewhere, but I realise this cannot be. It must be stored up and taken home. Looked up and pondered.

My only hope next time is that I can attend somewhere where it is not necessary to spend so much concentration on “listening”, but keep it all for the words. This is no reflection on the speakers, only on the building. How excellent it is to hear God’s gifts of words and speech used for His Glory.

The programme sections gave a useful framework and a sense of progression through the evening. I hope we shall have a repeat of this experiment to hear again some of these items and to share some of those others which must have been cast aside reluctantly when the programme was arranged.



THE ABBEY OF ROYAUMONT. THE OLD REFECTORY

## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The peace of the old Cistercian monastery of Royaumont in France, which was founded in the thirteenth century under the royal patronage of Louis VIII, and now is in private ownership: it is in this lovely place that the Second International Conference of Modern Christian Drama will take place, from July 21st–26th, 1960, the first having been held in Great Britain—at Oxford in 1955.

A strange background, perhaps, for a Conference which will deal above all with contemporary, experimental drama in this modern world of ours. What would they think, those monks of former times, if they heard of a modern Zulu *Job* or a *Pageant of Sugar Cane*, of the *Ten Virgins* danced to Indian songs—or indeed, of our own *Christ in the Concrete City*? They would surely be surprised to see Christians from all five Continents met together at their monastery to discuss what, after all, was one of the monks' own aims, the practical application of the Christian faith to everyday life—although in our case, from one special angle, that of drama. The monks prayed and grew vegetables: those assembled at this Conference also pray, but they toil in quite a different way, equally, we hope, to the glory of God.

The R.D.S. is organising this Conference to bring together people of all denominations and nationalities, concerned with religious drama from various aspects. The delegates, of whom there will be about fifty, will be actors, producers, playwrights, critics, youth workers, broadcasters—people whose work takes place under all sorts of conditions and in all sorts of places, whether under the bright lights of New York, in a Swedish church or in a German theatre; among primitive peoples far from civilisation, or in the mechanised world of dictatorship countries. All should have much to learn from one another.

It is planned to hinge discussions on the three main topics:—

Christian drama in the theatre,

Drama in the church building (liturgical),

Experimental Christian drama in unorthodox conditions.

The third category will include plays in the street, in the factory, in the mission field, in fact in any place where an audience can be gathered.

Fortunately for the delegates, sweating under the July sun, only twenty-two miles out of Paris, the whole of the five days will not be spent in listening to lectures or in hot discussion. As a contrast, and by way of demonstration, there will be performances of contemporary plays by professionals and amateurs from various countries, keeping, on the whole, to the three languages in which the Conference will be run, English, French and German. These plays too will be quite varied: a Swedish liturgical drama, a Swiss murder play, a French *David and Bathsheba*, and other productions.

Our aim in bringing these delegates together is not only that they may share their experience, valuable as this is, but also that they may realise the need for clear thinking as to the purpose of religious drama, and the necessity for a radical raising of the standards of play-writing and production. Only in this way can we hope to achieve, with any measure of success, the communication of the Christian faith and its principles through drama, not just as an item of historic interest but also as the Way of Life in the twentieth century.

We have to thank the Rockefeller Foundation of New York and the Council of Europe, who have made this Conference financially possible. It has been most encouraging to receive this practical support of our work and aims.

A report on the Conference will appear in a later number of this journal.

CARINA ROBINS.

## OBITUARY

Frances Mary Barton, who died on March 9th at the age of eighty, was the devoted friend of the Salisbury Religious Drama Fellowship from its foundation. As an early member of the Religious Drama Society's Council, Diocesan Secretary for many years, then Wardrobe Mistress, and finally Librarian, she worked indefatigably, and never failed to provide help and inspiration. Whilst the Fellowship deeply mourns the loss of one who so gladly spent herself on its behalf, it rejoices in the privilege of having known her, and of having had, for so long, her guidance, enthusiasm, and most loyal service.

# HOLIDAY COURSE IN RELIGIOUS DRAMA

In 1960 the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain will hold its annual Summer School at Culham College, Abingdon, near Oxford, from August 16th to 25th.

This year the Society is combining with the Committee for Religious Drama in the Northern Province. Pamela Keily has been asked to direct the School and has been encouraged to plan a programme which will be primarily concerned with Christian Communication in the present-day world.

Experienced drama tutors will take rehearsals and will co-operate with clergy and ministers to raise both the dramatic and theological standard of religious plays.

Chaplains take daily Services and visiting lecturers will speak on various aspects of the work.

Culham College is ideally situated for a holiday course. There are beautiful country surroundings, tennis courts, and a river for boating and bathing. Oxford is only eight miles away and other places of interest, such as Blenheim Palace and Dorchester Abbey, are within easy reach.

Reduced fees are arranged for those under eighteen, under thirty, and for members of the Society. Further particulars are available from the Drama School Secretary, Religious Drama Society of Great Britain, 166 Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.C. 2.

## PLAYS AND BOOKS

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## LONDON THEATRE

By FRANCES GLENDENNING

What is a play? After visiting a dozen or more of London's theatres, it might be difficult to answer this question in fewer than 2,000 words. But out of all the variety of musicals, moralities, social studies and Shakespeare, there are two which invite the signature of Q.E.D. to the proposition that this is a demonstration of what a play is. One is Eugene O'Neill's *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, the other, Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*.

## Three Plays at the Royal Court Theatre

Three plays, or to be more accurate, one play, *Rosmersholm*, one morality, *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance*, and "an evening of high drung and slarrit", *One Way Pendulum*.

*Rosmersholm* was an unknown Ibsen play to me and no doubt I missed as much of the subtlety of the play as the reader of St. Mark's Gospel who takes it as a simple biography. But there was more than enough in the production and the performance of this play to keep even the most ignorant of the audience in the grip of theatre magic.

Dame Peggy Ashcroft's performance as Rebecca West has an authority which sweeps the audience through the undertones and ambiguities of the play. Her pace and perception are matched by Eric Porter (Rosmer himself) and by Mark Dignam who succeeded in giving to the bigot Kroll a measure of sympathy and sincerity. The gradual revelation of Rebecca's motives in coming to live in the Rosmer household, the circumstances of Mrs. Rosmer's death, Rebecca's inability to accept Rosmer's love when it is finally offered are all communicated to the audience with the weight of dramatic skill by both author and players.

But in spite of all this perfection, I was surprised to find that I had been quite unmoved. John Rosmer's loss of faith and even Rebecca's growth of self-awareness are rarely more than interesting and although in the theatre I was compelled by Ibsen's dramatic power to suspend my disbelief, once outside on the pavement, the characters receded to less than life size. The decision to commit suicide at the end had no real inevitability about it and no quality of universality. It was the decision of two unusual individuals.

The western revolution in ways of thinking and of living may make Ibsen's characters theatrical to a degree inconceivable to him but nothing can detract from his skill in their dramatic presentation. *Rosmersholm* is *par excellence* a play.

In *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* by John Arden the curtain goes up on a canal wharf on a winter's night where three soldiers await their sergeant. The audience almost shivers with the soldiers, so cold is the air coming off the frost blue backcloth. There is some mystery about the purpose of the visit of this band to a strike-bound town where the strikers regard them as hostile, the authorities as a possible tool and the audience as a recruiting mission. Gradually it is revealed that Sergeant Musgrave is driven by an inner compulsion to atone for military violence in some British occupied territory. The atonement is the turning of a gatling gun on to the crowd assembled to hear the recruiting speeches. These are a denunciation of

military methods uncomfortably reminiscent of some accounts of Cyprus and elsewhere ("no undue violence but. . . .")

The curtain falls on the sergeant in prison and the audience is left with no faith in militarism, no faith in the sergeant's maniacal remedy but still under the spell of the direction (Lindsay Anderson), the decor (Jocelyn Herbert) and the acting, especially of Ian Bannen as Serjeant Musgrave, Freda Jackson as the proprietor of a Public House and Patsy Byrne as Annie the simpleton.

This is a play which keeps the audience guessing and even if the answers are negative the audience does not feel wholly frustrated because of the very considerable skill which moves the play to its devastating denouement.

There is room in the theatre for a play like *One Way Pendulum* which belongs to no recognized category, is neither establishment nor anti-establishment, but shakes up a good many ideas of what the theatre is all about. Its "subtitle" is "an evening of high drung and slarrit".

The play, written by N. F. Simpson, presents a slice of the Groomkirby family life. In many ways the Groomkirby family is like any other family, but what makes it so memorable is the way in which it slips into the fantastic, both hilarious and prophetic.

Mrs. Groomkirby (Alison Leggatt) has a son whose hobby is training weighing machines to sing and whose ambition is to have a massed choir of them singing the Hallelujah chorus. The audience has a glimpse of this vision at the opening of the play when the three weighing machines on the stage are joined by tens and hundreds of them on a screen and the music swells from a solo "mi mi mi me" to a hundred hallelujahs.

Her husband's practically full-time hobby is the study of law and by the second act, Mr. Groomkirby (George Benson) has transformed the living room into a replica of the Old Bailey complete with judge and counsel.

Mrs. Groomkirby's sister, played by Patsy Byrne, spends her time in a wheel-chair convinced that she is on an eternal railway journey. This leads to some prophetic remarks about travelling in order to arrive in order to depart in order to travel and so *ad infinitum*.

Mrs. Groomkirby provides the nearest resemblance to a fixed point in a spinning world but her acceptance of her family's idiosyncrasies borders on the fantastic and contributes to the helpless hilarity of the audience. Confronted for the first time with a huge oak witness box in the living room, she says, "What an awkward place to put a witness box".

The audience seemed only too delighted to take its feet off the ground and to be tossed hither and thither by the combined forces of author, director, William Gaskill, and players. Perhaps this is a polite way of saying that the play moved from laugh to laugh, rather than from climax to climax but the stage would be the poorer without these inspired antics.

### Christmas Fare

The Church may have some reservations about the apotheosis of children which takes place annually in December but like the theatre, it spends some time in searching for suitable plays for them.

The theatre at this time of year must be ever grateful to Nicholas Stuart Grey for his delightful adaptations of fairy tales. *The Princess and the Swineherd* at the Theatre Royal, Stratford, E. 15 came to an end before the date on

my ticket arrived but I was more fortunate with *Beauty and the Beast* at the Arts Theatre Club.

*Beauty and the Beast* is an irresistible title but the honours of the play are equally shared by the forgetful wizard and his dragon. The play is lovely to look at and to listen to although the movement, apart from the dragon, is as staid as the Victorian dresses of the three sisters. Perhaps it is the sinister influence of pantomime and musical which make me regret the absence of any exhilarating romp in this production. There are a great many scene changes and in the third act, a very adult voice in the audience was heard to say, "Oh not again" as Joan Jefferson Farjeon's enchanting drop curtain descended for the eleventh time, and a very young voice emitted an uninhibited yawn. But no concentration could have been greater than on the endearing young dragon (Dudy Nimmo) and on the Beast (Michael Atkinson).

The play was directed by the author and Ruth Atkinson.

Christmas Fare at the Old Vic was Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a play which easily fits the mood and provides the laughs of an audience out to enjoy itself. It may seem a long hop from the glory and humiliation of the Incarnation to belly laughs in the second row of the stalls but at least Shakespeare and the Old Vic Company have the power to rock us with the laughter that is free from artificiality and heartiness. It may be special pleading to suggest that this atmosphere reflects the joy of Christmas as faithfully as many a Christian Christmas party but it is certainly no less congruous.

The play is a very moral tale of faithful but very merry wives and their jealous but penitent husbands, all set against a background of the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth I. The resurrected Falstaff appears as a figure untouched by tragedy but still "in the waist two yards about" (at least this girth in John Hale's production of Joss Ackland). It is difficult to think that even Lucky Jim could have resisted the spirit of "Merrie England" in this play, and how one regrets that twentieth-century man wears such drab clothes when he has perfected dyes more brilliant than the world has ever seen.

### English and Irish

*My Friend Judas* by Andrew Sinclair is the English play, based on a novel by the same author, and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* by Eugene O'Neill is a play more Irish than American. Both plays were seen at the Arts Theatre Club.

When a novel is dramatised, the result is sometimes a feeling of indignation that the theatre should have to put up with such ill-fitting second-hand clothes. Why does no one turn a play into a novel? The answer has probably more to do with commerce than with art. *My Friend Judas* on the stage has many hints of its original novel form, a story of student life in Cambridge. Blasphemy, beds and boredom are all in the plot but there are too many trees for the size of the wood.

The scenes between the two so contrasted undergraduates, played by Dinsdale Landen and Jeremy Spenser, sometimes clashed with real dramatic vigour and sometimes ranted tediously. The tutor, Tony Church, is sufficiently imaginative to get behind the apparent cynicism of the student from the Midlands and their conversation goes deeper than mere observation of

student life. Judy, the "Judas" of the title, played by Ann Lynn, is the most frequent occupant of the bed in the fine composite set by Paul Mayo of bedroom, study and bridge. In the play she is little more than a caricature and only serves to reinforce the stereotype of student promiscuity. She may be a live character in the novel but she cannot stand up to the demands of the theatre. The play was directed by Fred Sadoff.

Eugene O'Neill's *A Moon for the Misbegotten* was written in 1943, published in 1952, and produced in 1960. The world has waited too long for this wonderful play. Father and daughter, with more Irish than American blood in their veins, scratch a living as tenant farmers of a millionaire who lives on the next farm. Josie the daughter (Margaret Whiting) has a reputation for scandalous living and in the first few moments she demonstrates the power of her arm and her tongue. But she is warm, vivid, alive and has the audience in the palm of her dirty brown hand. In the first act she and her father play an almost music hall scene with their rich neighbour who is stripped of his riding crop and all his dignity and likened to "the King of England at an Irish wake". The quality of Miss Whiting's acting makes it quite irrelevant that her physique is unlike that suggested in the text.

In the second act Josie's scandalous reputation is revealed as a cover for her virginity. In a moving and acutely perceptive scene Josie and Jim Tyrone (Michael Aldridge), the educated alcoholic, confess their love for each other with many swift and truly dramatic changes of mood. The morning brings Jim's departure with half remembered awareness of the events of the night, and Josie's return to her farm life with a deeper awareness of herself.

(Continued over-page)

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One emerges from this play feeling more than life-size and awestruck at the heights and depths into which one has so easily followed the dramatist and his interpreters. Ibsen may be a greater craftsman but O'Neill in this play calls forth every possible response from his audience. In my judgment, this is the greatest play in the London theatre. It is directed by Clifford Williams.

### "Religious Plays"

This heading is for the sake of tidiness as much as for true definition and may Shaw forgive me for including *St. Joan*.

First of all a film, *Ben-Hur*, at the Empire Theatre, Leicester Square.

This film runs for three hours thirty-five minutes on a very wide screen and although the main impression may be of length and breadth, the film is not without depth. The unity of the film is preserved by a proper concentration on Ben-Hur himself and even throughout the filmic miracles of the sea battle and the chariot race, he is the centre of attention.

It is said that when this film was shown in New York, there were placards in the foyer saying that the film would offend neither Jew, Christian nor Moslem. To the Christian, this might suggest a very watery version of the faith once delivered to the saints but it has the effect of preserving the film from certain artistic death by preaching. To see the crucifixion as an event incidental to the family life of Ben-Hur is in some ways more powerful than seeing it as the main event. Obviously the Christian brings his own associations to what he sees but he is wonderfully free from the embarrassment of "being got at", and from gross mishandling of the gospel narratives. Two details of direction struck a false note, the glossiness of the Lord's wig and the cleanliness of his robe were overdone at the sermon on the mount, and there was an uncommon amount of blood at the crucifixion.

William Wyler was the director with a colossal team of technical and artistic assistants. Charles Heston played Ben-Hur. The colour in the film was particularly rich and true, a marked contrast to the muddiness of the souvenir programme.

Secondly, a play written for a special occasion, *People of Nowhere* by James Brabazon. This play was written for World Refugee Year and produced by John Crockett "in the round" in St. Thomas' Church, Regent Street. Ruth Lodge and Frederick Schiller play the leading parts.

The play was exciting, disturbing, moving without sentimentality. The first half was full of hope, as a Polish family is miraculously reunited, the second showed increasing hopelessness as the family was split by sickness, violence and the knowledge of rejection. Throughout the play the figure of Isaac, an old Jewish refugee who scrounges anything from a needle and cotton to a place to sleep from the Polish family, clings to his dreams of belonging to God's free people.

In a year specially devoted to raising money for refugees, this play speaks of the futility of money to heal broken relationships and loss of hope, of the futility of palliatives of food and clothing. This helps us to live with the contradiction of being compelled to give and at the same time of being aware of the almost bottomless pit of need into which our trifles are dropped.

And thirdly *St. Joan*, under the direction of Douglas Seale at the Old Vic.

CHRISTIAN DRAMA



*THE LILY WHITE BOYS*

BY HARRY COOKSON AND CHRISTOPHER LOGUE, AT THE ROYAL COURT  
THEATRE

LEFT TO RIGHT: SHIRLEY ANN FIELD, ALBERT FINNEY, PHILIP LOCKE,  
MONTY LANDIS

*(Photo by John Cowan)*

There was a noticeable scattering of clerical collars in the audience on the night that I was there. It would be impertinent to assume that they were there because it was a "religious" play and were out to assess its theology. But their presence provides an excuse for saying that to judge a play by its theology is like judging a beauty competition by the ankles only.

Theological comment on *St. Joan* is only meaningful when it takes into account the dramatic presentation of situations and characters. The more academic kind of comment should be siphoned off on to the 20,000 words of the Preface to *St. Joan*.

The Old Vic production will be remembered for Barbara Jefford as *St. Joan* and for Alex McCowen as the Dauphin. These two players are capable of the most clear-cut characterisation. It was fascinating to watch the Dauphin's reluctant and gradual response to Joan's enthusiasm and to see his new courage so ready to disappear. Joan herself was a most convincing peasant girl and soldier. Perhaps Shaw is as much to blame as Miss Jefford for the lack of any numinous quality in her playing. Her reaction to her first meeting with the Archbishop was both beautiful and moving and this was about the only occasion when the Archbishop was anything but a stagey figure of fun.

Shaw must take some responsibility for some patches of tedium in the production, but on the whole, music, lighting, and costume all combined to support the players in a powerful and clear-cut presentation.

### Musicals

This most popular genre is now strongly underpinned by importations from the East, that is to say from the Theatre Royal in Stratford, E. 15. Three of Miss Littlewood's productions are now running in neighbouring theatres—*The Hostage*, *Make Me an Offer*, and *Fings Ain't wot they used t'be*. These last two and *The Lily White Boys* at the Royal Court Theatre are the subject of this paragraph.

*The Lily White Boys* are three juvenile delinquents who decide that as there is no hope of big money in knocking out old age pensioners for their money, they will try to "go legitimate" and break in on the "legitimate racket". The play describes their efforts to go straight and the help they fail to find from a youth leader, a business man, a solicitor, a trades union, etc.

The play is at the Royal Court Theatre, written by Harry Cookson, with songs by Christopher Logue and music by Tony Kinsey and Bill Le Sage. Lindsay Anderson is the director, and Albert Finney, Monty Landis and Philip Locke played the *Lily White Boys*.

The setting was a clever backdrop covered with the endless monotony of windows and wall in a vast office block. Against this, huge advertisement hoardings were lowered in appropriate scenes. The familiar figures and slogans of Moss Bros., the *Sunday Times*, Post Office Savings (the leggy girl on the swing) all came in to add their bit to the complexity of the "legitimate racket".

This is the kind of play which provides information in a vivid and entertaining way about a world which many Christians do not realise they inhabit. The parallels between a life of crime and life in the "legitimate racket" may have been considered before but here they were presented sharply enough to

change the tone of the audience's laughter. The revised version of "Green Grow the Rushes O" sung at the end suggest the number of institutions that are satirised (six for the B.B.C. O, four for the Church of England) but the satire is not dissipated because of this.

The play included a film sequence of incidents in the life of one of the delinquents. The conclusion is a black-out and then a replica on the stage of the final shot. This was a thrilling moment.

If life came into *Make Me an Offer* in the East End, the West End seems to have drained it away.

It was a most disappointing evening partly because it was impossible to take sides with any of the uninteresting cast or to care tuppence about the indifferent plot. The opening music had no power to stop the audience's chatter and although according to the programme notes some of the cast were technically qualified to sing, the effect was either unnoticeable or as in the case of John True the auctioneer (Martin Lawrence) quite incongruous with the rest of the production.

Many of the characters had to struggle with inconsequential entrances and exits and the set was more of a hindrance than a help. Front of stage was the Portobello Road and centre stage with a passage all the way round was a kind of free standing apartment, occupied by Charlie, Sally and son. Just as the pram cluttered up the apartment, so the apartment seemed to clutter the stage.

The only sparks in the production came from Daniel Massey as Charlie the young dealer and Sheila Hancock as Gwen, a demolition dealer's daughter. There was a brief lift of the spirit in the company's singing of "Portobello Road" but Miss Littlewood has accustomed us to such exhilaration from beginning to end that it was impossible to be satisfied with this comparatively limp effort.

There does seem to be evidence for the suggestion that Theatre Royal, E. 15 plays do better in their natural habitat than in the more artificial atmosphere and with the more electric audience of W. 1. (*The Hostage* seems to be an exception.)

*Fings Ain't wot they used t'be* in E. 15 is a remarkably rumbustious production, crude in word and gesture but nevertheless very much at ease and somehow with the power to make visiting members of the audience feel at home. Theatre Royal has a gay compact auditorium with a sparkling chandelier, the gift of Mr. Donald Albery, hanging from the roof.

Things which would be astonishing in the West End seem appropriate and part of the atmosphere there. For example the programme note, "in accordance with modern theatre practice, National Anthems will only be played in the presence of Royalty and Heads of State". Also wines from the U.S.S.R. are obtainable in the bar. In the West End every member of the audience is a visitor and while it would be improper to suggest that the audience in E.15 is more familiar with the world of spieler, carve ups, pences, prostitutes and gamblers (the setting of *Fings Ain't wot they used t'be* is actually Soho) the greater homogeneity of the E. 15 audience makes it easier to absorb naturally what is seen on the stage. Sitting in the stalls at the Garrick, one is vaguely aware of pockets of inhibition, or on the other hand that the identification between one's neighbour in mink and the pences and "birds" on the stage has an artificiality that is disturbing.

*Fings Ain't wot they used t'be* is a musical by Frank Norman and Lionel Bart, directed by Joan Littlewood. It tells of the fortunes of Frederick Cochran (Glynn Edwards) who runs a speiler in Soho with its clientele of gamblers, prostitutes, odds and ends and its police. Cochran the razor King, is a man of a few words but unquestioned authority. Tosher (James Booth), the ponce, walks and talks through the production with a nervous energy that is hard to keep pace with. His motto is *Honi soit qui mal y pence*. Wallas Eaton plays three parts, including a highly aesthetic interior decorator. The transformation of the speiler is marked by the singing of a number, "Contempery". Lily Smith (Miriam Karlin) sings, "I've got news for Wolfenden, fings ain't wot they used t'be" and after fifteen years of life with Fred, she marries him. The priest produced for the occasion is the stage variety who will do anything for money.

This production was notable for the quality of its singing as well as for its zest. Both *Make Me an Offer* and *The Lily White Boys* are weak in this respect but no excuses are necessary for *Fings Ain't wot they used t'be*.

The Theatre Royal is a phenomenon. It is not for nothing that it is called the People's Theatre. The people were there, young and old. How long can the Theatre Workshop stand the strain of such success, and how long will Miss Littlewood's genius be able to stand the strain of publicity and West End glitter? To my mind her contribution to the London theatre is profound.

## INTRODUCING "THE PLAY OF DANIEL"

On May 27th and 28th in Wells Cathedral the first performances in Europe for over five centuries of *The Play of Daniel* will be given by the Pro Musica Ensemble from New York, as part of this year's Bath Festival. The Pro Musica Ensemble, led by their director Noah Greenberg, are coming to Europe after an invitation from Yehudi Menuhin, the famous violinist who is Artistic Director of the Festival. The visit has been made possible by the U.S. Government which has provided the money for all thirty-four members of the New York company to travel to Europe with their instruments, costumes and properties; and plans are being made for them to undertake a fairly extensive European tour. After Wells, performances of the play will probably be given in Westminster Abbey in the second week of June and in St. Albans Abbey late in July following visits to France and Italy. The English tour is arranged in association with the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain.

*The Play of Daniel* is officially described as a twelfth-century liturgical drama which is a pretty off-putting description for ordinary folk; and so at Bath we have decided to call it a musical play, which is just what it is. Although the play is in Latin, W. H. Auden has written a narration which links the scenes and describes what is about to happen. The music is tuneful, colourful and easy to listen to; the story, which is quite simply that of Daniel from the Old Testament, including the episode of the lions' den, is dramatic and exciting and lends itself to the primitive yet vivid style of production which E. Martin Browne has devised for it—for example in the course of the

fifty minutes which the play lasts there are six processions, and each has its distinctive character derived from the different combination of instruments used.

*The Play of Daniel* in this production by Noah Greenberg and E. Martin Browne has had (in New York) over the last three years the sort of success that theatre promoters dream about; tickets for all performances sold out within a few hours of booking opening has been the usual story and we are very fortunate that a way has been found of bringing the original company complete with its properties and costumes to Europe this summer. Do go and see it if you can—you will be enchanted by its simple effectiveness and will, I am sure, enjoy it, which was what its original authors, students of the Abbey of Beauvais in the twelfth century, intended.

JACK PHIPPS,  
*Festival Administrator, Bath Festival.*

#### Note

We anticipate that many of our readers will be interested in this play and will want to arrange coach parties to the nearest place of performance. Particulars will be available from the R.D.S. Office.

CARINA ROBINS.

## MID-YEAR MEETING

(Note: We are just able to include this brief account as "Christian Drama" goes to press.)

The meeting held on Saturday, March 19th, at the Y.M.C.A., Tottenham Court Road, drew a large and representative attendance of our members.

The topic chosen for discussion on this occasion was whether or not the Society should urge changes in the law relating to plays on Sundays, passed in 1760 and full of anomalies for the present-day situation.

Mr. Raymond Chapman spoke first, in favour of the proposition. The Society's Treasurer, Mr. J. H. L. Trustram, explained the facts of the legal situation, and Mr. David William made a plea, as a professional producer, for greater latitude.

Letters read to the meeting laid stress on the dangers of opening commercial theatres on Sundays, and this was reinforced by Mr. Nicholas Hannen and others present, who feared the loss of safeguards on the actor's one free day for worship and family life. The meeting supported this view.

It was agreed, however, that the wide variations in practice in different parts of Great Britain, and the ambiguities of the Lord Chamberlain's regulations, are an unnecessary handicap to amateurs especially in the field of religious drama.

The resolution finally carried *nem. con.* read as follows: "That the Society hold discussions with the Lord Chamberlain with a view to finding some means of allowing the Society and its member groups to give public performances of plays on Sundays."

# “THE DARK NIGHT”

Terror in Lombard Street !

We usually think of a play as entertainment. When it is over, we ask each other “Did you enjoy it?” The other evening, on my way home from the office, I turned in to the Church of St. Edmund the King, which stands hemmed in and overshadowed by the great bank buildings of London’s Lombard Street. Thither I had been invited to see a play called *The Dark Night* by R. W. Hill (produced by Carina Robins); and thither I went, curious but little thinking that I was about to be pitchforked into an experience which could never be described as entertainment, and which, far from being enjoyable, I found—well, shattering.

Briefly, this play describes the events at a special service held in this very Church of St. Edmund’s. It imagines that our country has fallen under a Godless totalitarian rule, and this service is one of the many called throughout the land as a Christian challenge to an atheist way of life. The wisdom of this move is doubted by some, who fear that it may provoke the Dictator to exterminate the Church.

This much we learn from dialogue between the Priest and his sister (the organist) and the Verger before the service begins. Then, with the scene set, the Verger goes to open the church doors to let in the congregation.

At this point we, the audience, suddenly find that we have assumed the role of the congregation. Instead of being about “them”, this play is about “us”.

The service begins. We sing “Jesus lives”. We pray. One of the congregation rises, goes to the lectern and reads the lesson. The Priest mounts the pulpit and begins a very disturbing sermon. “Up till now it has been merely inconvenient to be a Christian—from now on it is likely to be deadly dangerous. Be strong!”

Mid-sermon comes the tramp of marching feet outside. Orders are barked. The church doors crash open and the State Force men burst in upon us. We suddenly find ourselves staring straight down the barrels of their sub-machine guns. Their officer addresses us in harsh contemptuous tones. We are told of the new law, forbidding the holding of religious beliefs (!!). We are ordered to recant here and now. The Officer will count ten: anyone who wishes to persist in his religious faith will stand—and will be dealt with. Anyone who does not stand will be deemed to have recanted. “One—two—three”.

I need not continue the outline beyond this point, except to mention that we are treated to the spectacle of one of our number being frogmarched out of the church—and to the sound of the firing squad. The action of the play is carried on by members of the real cast, planted here and there amongst the congregation. We are led through some of the agonies of the man torn between family ties and loyalty to his God and his Saviour. The Dictator himself chooses to visit our particular church, and we hear a duel of wits and faith between him and our pastor—and a bold and defiant mother, one of our number.

I need not say how the evil hour of decision is postponed for a day and we are extricated from this horrible predicament and allowed to escape, quaking,

into the cold night air of Lombard Street. It was like waking up from some awful nightmare.

I suppose there can be few more cramped and inconvenient stages on which to produce a play, than the average church. Seldom can this disadvantage have been more cleverly dealt with and turned more skilfully into the main asset of the play, than by our author here. For it was this treatment of the subject which carried his message right home.

Viewed critically, this play probably has its weaknesses—notably the anti-climax inherent in the need to return the audience to themselves at the end. Perhaps the Dictator and the schoolboy would-be martyr may have detracted from realism. However, to be critical, one must be detached—and this play knocked me clean off my critical perch.

Why was it so successful in this? Well, to any non-Christian member of the audience, it may have missed the mark, but speaking for myself, it succeeded because of three factors:

Firstly, I am (or I try to be) a Christian.

Secondly, I was conscripted into the action of the play and was not allowed to be a spectator.

Thirdly, although the play was fictitious, I could not escape from the truth it portrayed—from the question it so dramatically posed. I could not, like a frightened child at the cinema, seek the comfort of knowing that it was only make-believe. I was all too uncomfortably aware of the history of our Church, written in the blood of its martyrs, and of the persecutions of our own times—of Mau Mau victims; of the plight of Christians in China (of which I was reading only a few weeks ago).

This play took me out of time and place to stand beside the brazier with Peter, to face the Roman lions, to the concentration camps of Hitler, to the “discredittings” and firing squads of Communist China. It faced me squarely with the question “What would you do?”

I don’t think I shall ever forget this Dark Night.

MICHAEL KENTISH.

## PLANS FOR THE U.S.A.

Growing concern for the future of religious drama has resulted in steps being taken to create a national organisation to advance religious drama in the United States. A five-man steering committee to lay the groundwork for such a group was organised at Boston University’s 1959 summer conference on “Next Steps in Religious Drama”.

“There is growing concern among leaders in the field of religious drama that this increased activity and interest should reflect the best that the church has to offer,” says the Rev. J. Blaine Fister, staff advisor, Committee on Religious Drama of the Commission on General Christian Education of the National Council of Churches’ Division of Christian Education.

“The church faces a serious handicap in religious drama activity,” Mr. Fister added, “because of the scarcity of good resources and material as well as trained leadership. The formation of a national religious drama society

will provide the co-ordination and pooling of resources that are vital for the future of religious drama in the U.S."

Specific functions planned for the national group will be outlined in a report on the Boston University Conference by Dr. Harold Ehrensparger, associate professor of religion and creative art at the university's School of Theology. The Lilly Foundation, of Indianapolis, will underwrite the report which will be available to the public in the fall of this year.

A twelve-man commission, with the task of drawing up a blueprint and timetable for the religious drama society, will be convened by the Rev. A. Argyle Knight, chairman of the National Council's drama committee. The commission will report to a meeting of the American Educational Theatre association in December and to the annual meeting of the National Council's Division of Christian Education in February 1960. The commission will also contact other church, school and community drama groups.

The five members of the steering committee are Mr. Marvin Halverson, Executive Secretary of the Department of Worship and the Arts, National Council of Churches; Dr. Tom Driver, drama critic of the *Christian Century* and assistant professor of theology, Union Seminary, New York; Robert Seaver, head of the religious drama programme at Union Seminary, New York; Dr. Ehrensparger, who is also chairman of the American Educational Theatre Association; Mr. Knight; and Mr. Fister.

—reprinted by courtesy of the  
*Interchurch News*, U.S.A.

## “WRITERS’ EVENING”

There is a chronic shortage of good, stage-worthy, vital Christian plays. What can we do about it?

One step is to acquaint contemporary playwrights with the opportunities and pitfalls of this work and to find out what they, for their part, think and feel about religious drama.

With this in mind, the R.D.S. of G.B. invited a number of dramatists, professional and amateur, to a meeting at the Y.M.C.A., Tottenham Court Road, on Thursday, January 14th. Mrs. K. M. Baxter acted as Chairman, and the opening speakers were Miss Pamela Keily, as a producer, and Mr. James Brabazon, as a dramatist.

Space does not allow us to report in detail the many and varied points of view that were expressed. We only hope that this may have made some dramatists more aware of the present situation, and that further meetings will now be possible.

# ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

X: suitable for churches.

H: suitable for halls.

## PLAYS

**Christianity in a Great City.** MURIEL HARDILL and ROBERT C. WALTON. (S.C.M. Press, 4/-.) H.

Five short, simply written plays on the *Epistles to the Corinthians*, with comments and notes; helpful for play-reading and study in school or Sunday School, rather than for performance.

Originally written for School Broadcasting (B.B.C.). (No fees.)

**The Dark Night.** R. W. HILL. (Typescript.) X. Continuous action (approximately 60 minutes). 8m., 4w., 1 boy, Police (at least 4).

An unusual play using both church building and audience as integral parts of the action.

For a full description, see p. 22. (Fee: £1/1/-, apply R.D.S.)

**The First Childdermass.** WILLIAM KEAN SEYMOUR. (Signet Press, 7/6.) H. 5 scenes. 13m., 1w., extras.

A Christmas play in distinguished blank verse, dealing mainly with Herod and the Magi; possibly the first play of this kind to bring the Monastery at Qumran into the picture, in the final scene. (Fee: £1/1/-, 10/6.)

**Forgotten People.** A. J. BRADBURY. (Leonards Plays, 123 Heythorpe Street, London, S.W. 18, 1/9.) H. 1 act. 4m., 3w.

A refugee family have the opportunity at last to go to America. One member only cannot be accepted, and disaster is only just averted in time. (Fee: £1/1/-.)

**The Freedom of the Prisoner.** EDZARD SCHAPER, tr. ISABEL and FLORENCE McHUGH. (Typescript.) H. 9 scenes (2 hours.) 10m., 1w.

Translated from the German, on the story of a French military prisoner in 1805, and considering physical and spiritual freedom. (Fee: apply translators.)

**A Glimpse of Eternity.** EMILY BRADLEY. (Typescript.) H. 5 continuous scenes. 6m., Choir of Angels.

A modern morality play on the theme of the Parable of Dives and Lazarus. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

**Out of Bondage.** PATRICK B. MACE. (Epworth Press, 2/6.) H. 1 act. 3m., 2w. Free-verse.

Four survivors of an air crash gather in the jungle, which is haunted by Lilith, the spirit of natural life. One man, Kane, confesses that he sabotaged the plane, for political motives. Justice demands his life; but all four people are necessary if the party is to reach safety, and the others decide they must learn to forgive; since the Incarnation, the vicious circle of crime and punishment can be broken. (Fee: 10/6, 7/6.)

**People of Nowhere.** JAMES BRABAZON. (Bloomsbury Publishing Co., 3/-.) H. 2 acts. 11m., 4w., 3 children, soldiers, refugees.

Produced at St. Thomas', Regent Street, for the World Refugee Year.

It tells the story of the Maczek family of Polish refugees, living in a German camp. Mother and Father and two sons are happily reunited there, and would have left for America, but for the arrival of their daughter, Janina, who has a touch of tuberculosis and therefore cannot be accepted. They refuse to leave her behind, and remain.

Twelve years later, they are still there, and have degenerated into chronic tension and despair. One of the boys, courting a German girl, kills a man in a brawl, and dies of his own injuries. All hope has gone for the Maczek—unless...? (Fee: apply Christopher Mann, Ltd.)

**The Seeking Years.** Ed. JOHN M. GUNN. (Bethany Press, Missouri, \$1.50.) Six C.B.S.-T.V. plays from the series *Look Up and Live*. (No fees.)

**Sister Martha's Miracles.** B. M. CLEGG. (R.D.S./S.P.C.K., 4/-.) H. 1 act. 4m., 7w. Free-verse.

A cheerful play by the author of the popular *The Apple Tree*. Martha, a lay-sister at a convent of the Middle Ages, runs a successful dispensary for "out-patients", in spite of the disapproval of Sister Alys, and the ingratitude and ungratefulness of the queue. Consternation ensues when an abandoned baby is found in the place of the Christ Child Martha should have been guarding, but all ends happily. (Fee: 10/6.)

**The Sleeping Fires.** T. B. MORRIS. (S. French, 1/6.) H. 1 act. 11 or more girls.

A competently written play for a cast of five teenage girls and at least six younger children.

Set in Pompeii on the day of the disaster, it shows the Roman children at play, and the struggle of a Christian slave family to stand up for their faith. (Fee: £1/1/-.)

**The Valley of the Shadow.** JOYCE POLLARD. (Epworth Press, 9d.) H. 1 act. 5w.

Five women in an oppressed country await execution at dawn, some with terror, some with resignation. A Christian woman who has lost her sons is reprieved, but at the last moment takes the place of another whose children still need her.

A good, strong one-act play for women. (Fee: 2/6.)

**Which Way the Wind?** PHILIP C. LEWIS. (American Friends Service Committee, \$1.)

H. 3m., 1w. Continuous action.

A documentary play for America, about the evils of nuclear war.

## REFERENCE BOOKS

**An Introduction to Charles Williams.** A. M. HADFIELD. (Hale, 21/-.)

The first full length account of the life and works of this remarkable man, whose influence has been so far-reaching and whose religious plays have become classics—“difficult” but rewarding.

Miss Hadfield worked with Charles Williams at the Oxford University Press for some years, and the reminiscences in her book tend to the trivial; those who already know and love his work will enjoy this book, but it seems doubtful if it would serve as a genuine introduction, to a new reader.

**Practical Small Stage Lighting.** E. E. FARADAY. (Furse and Co., 4/-.)

**The Play of Daniel;** a thirteenth-century musical drama. Ed. by NOAH GREENBERG, with narration by W. H. Auden and preface by E. Martin Browne. (Oxford University Press, 25/-.)

The complete score, Latin text, and English translation; notes on staging; fully illustrated. For a detailed report, see p. 20.

Recording of the play: (G.B.) Brunswick AXTL 1086; (U.S.A., Canada) Decca DL 9402 (Stereo DL 79402).

**Drama for Women.** ALISON GRAHAM-CAMPBELL and FRANK LAMBE. (G. Bell and Sons, 12/6.)

An admirable book, written by two people of wide experience and real understanding of the many joys and problems of those for whom it is intended.

The authors keep strictly to their own subject, and supply an excellent bibliography for those who wish to make further study of its varied aspects.

The chapters on “The Problem of What to Act”, “Costumes and Properties” and “Things not to be Forgotten” are full of practical help which will be valued by all drama groups and especially useful to the less experienced. Strongly recommended.

—Annette Miller.

**Special Note**

Members' attention is drawn to *The Story of the Passion in Mime*, by the Rev. Canon R. H. Hawkins, a mime specially designed for church presentation, and originally produced by the author at St. Mary's, Nottingham. The library has two typescript copies, available for hire.

\* \* \* \*

**Religious Drama: a Handbook for Actors and Producers;** ed. by RAYMOND CHAPMAN. (S.P.C.K., cloth 12/6, paper-covered 8/6.)

A Handbook of this kind has been needed for some time, and the R.D.S. of G.B. feels proud to have been able, at last, to assemble a series of articles by well-known practitioners in the different aspects of religious drama, under the editorship of Mr. Chapman.

No attempt is made to copy the many books dealing with amateur drama as a whole. The Handbook confines itself to the special problems of "R.D.". The aim has been to produce as practical a guide as possible, based on the experience of the writers, and suggesting lines for new individual enterprise, rather than an established pattern to be followed.

We are grateful to S.P.C.K. for producing such an attractive volume.

A member writes:

"In the introduction to this book it is stated ' Anyone who regards this as giving knowledge had better not have read it '. This little volume whets the appetite for improved Religious Drama and the author of each chapter takes great pains to tell the reader that the offering of drama by a group acting as a Church group must give of the very best work possible. It is also said in the introduction that the object of the book is to help those who are involved in Religious Drama to achieve a more abundant life in their productions. This abundant life is perhaps explained as the very opposite of the rut into which Religious Drama had fallen before the comparatively recent realisation that it should be modern, down to earth and ' living '—a telling experience for the audience and those concerned in the production—both having something to give and receive.

"This handbook on all the facets of Religious Drama fills a need for those who, whilst having a fair working knowledge of the theatre and also a good Christian background, are not perhaps too familiar with the help that theatrical understanding can give to the life and work of the Church. Obviously in a book of this size it is quite impossible to cover each subject with any thoroughness but the author of each chapter gives enough suggestions so that the interested reader may be enabled to further the study of his subject.

"We have in this book the re-introduction of drama to the Church and it is up to the exponent of the drama, whether he be author, composer, producer, actor or back stage worker, to foster this introduction so that by patient research and hard work the Church may benefit from such talents as God has given us.

"The bibliography section contained in the last chapter gives a number of useful works of reference to study on the subjects discussed earlier, and if the volume is used as intended—that is as a ' signpost edition '—then it cannot but achieve its purpose.

"A slight criticism of the title—why not ' Religious Drama—an introductory Handbook '?"

D. A. C.

## AN APPRECIATION

of Mr. S. W. Jackson of 15 Maypole Yard, Long Row, Nottingham, the R.D.S. member who volunteered to help with book repairs following our appeal, and has given an entirely new look to over 200 books so far.

Mr. Jackson is a bookbinder by profession, and the generosity of his offer is matched by his skill and care in carrying it out. The Society as a whole joins with the Librarian in thanks.

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# ORDERING NEW BOOKS

As has been our practice in the past we will continue to supply to members our own publications and those of S.P.C.K., but it is no longer practicable for the Society to act as supplying agent for other publishers.

Members are therefore asked to order these direct from their own booksellers, or from the nearest S.P.C.K. bookshop, or from the publishers. This will prevent inevitable delays in delivery which cause inconvenience to members.

*Cut out the following list of the most prominent publishers of religious drama, and keep it for future reference.*

- Black, A. and C., Ltd.*, 4/5/6 Soho Square, London, W. 1.  
*Bles, Geoffrey, Ltd.*, 52 Doughty Street, London, W.C. 1.  
*Bloomsbury Publishing Co. Ltd.*, 34 Bloomsbury Street, London, W.C. 1.  
*Boosey and Hawkes, Ltd.*, 295 Regent Street, London, W.C. 1.  
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*Church Missionary Society (Highway Press)*, 6 Salisbury Square, London, E.C. 4.  
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*Epworth Press*, 25/35 City Road, London, E.C. 1.  
*Evans Bros., Ltd.*, Montague House, Russell Square, London, W.C. 1.  
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*Independent Press, Ltd.*, Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.  
*Jenkins, Herbert, Ltd.*, 3 Duke of York Street, London, S.W. 1.  
*London Missionary Society*, Livingstone House, Broadway, London, S.W. 1.  
*Lutterworth Press*, 4 Bouverie Street, London, E.C. 4.  
*Macmillan and Co. Ltd.*, St. Martin's Street, London, W.C. 2.  
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*Methodist Youth Dept.*, Ludgate Circus House, London, E.C. 4.  
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*Oxford University Press*, Amen House, Warwick Square, London, E.C. 4.  
*" " " " Music Dept.*, 44 Conduit Street, London, W. 1.  
*Quekett, Hugh, Ltd.*, apply *Evans Plays*, 35 Dover Street, London, W. 1.  
*Religious Education Press, Ltd.*, 85a Manor Road, Wallington, Surrey.  
*Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd.*, 68 Carter Lane, London, E.C. 4.

*Secker and Warburg*, 7 John Street, London, W.C. 1.

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*Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd.*, 1 Tavistock Chambers, Bloomsbury Way,  
London, W.C. 1.

*Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.)*, Principal Book-  
shop, 69 Great Peter Street, London, S.W. 1.

*Society for the Propagation of the Gospel*, 15 Tufton Street, London, S.W. 1.

*Student Christian Movement Press, Ltd.*, 58 Bloomsbury Street, London,  
W.C. 1.

*University of London Press, Ltd.*, Little Paul's House, Warwick Square,  
London, E.C. 4.

## IMPORTANT—ALL MEMBERS

The R.D.S. of G.B. LIBRARY will be CLOSED from

Monday, May 23rd to Wednesday, June 1st

for stock-taking and revision. No loans will be made during that time, and members are asked please to return single copies and sets for May 23rd, and to keep non-urgent enquiries until after June 1st.

THANK YOU

## FAR AND WIDE

### Bristol

*The Snow in the Street* was presented on a Sunday night within the Christmas festival in an ordinary parish hall with an ordinary stage at St. Nathanael with St. Katherine, Cotham, Bristol. The singers came across the auditorium, where they gathered under a "street lamp", at the end of the first row of chairs. Was this attempt to make the conventional sitting audience part of "the crowd in the street" successful? I think this point was made, to judge from comments afterwards. But it has to be admitted that there were those in the audience who "sat outside" the whole play, treating it as "holy entertainment" and naturally enough resentful of the rude reception given to the Christmas message.

The play was performed before and after the Festival Service of Nine Lessons and Carols, making a piquant contrast for those who could take it—who were, I should say, the majority—in an audience drawn from a rather bourgeois and middle-class area. Since the average age was middle to high, the point in the play (when the Child is born) when the onlookers gleefully jive to "God rest you merry, gentlemen" was rather lost on the audience, though some saw that this was not just another bit of rudeness but the natural joy of the teenager expressed in a modern idiom. What did come over well was the real impact of the Nativity play-within-the-play on the outsider, in abysmal contrast to the web-meaning but ineffective sermon preached by "Alec" at the end of it.

Perhaps of most importance was the effect on those less-regular Church people who took part in the play. The discussions which took place over cups of tea during rehearsals; the growing understanding of what it was "getting at"; the realisation that the fact of the incarnation is really important to those who believe in it and will take the trouble to produce plays of this sort, and the dedication of it all at the Parish Eucharist on the morning of the performances. The actual production of the play had great simplicity and therefore effectiveness.

\* \* \*

### Ghana

I shared in a most wonderful and moving presentation of Henri Gheon's *Vay of the Cross* by a cast of twenty-four students of University College of Ghana. The Stations were sited along the wide road up to the dignified and beautiful steps which lead up fifty feet or more to Commonwealth Hall. The large crowd of "audience" were invited to identify themselves with the action of the Play and we moved along with the players. The depicting of the Crucifixion itself (the Christus was utterly restrained and reverent) was sited on the top terrace, while we stood in the wide terrace twenty feet below; the Body was later carried down the steps to the level on which we stood, to the sepulchre curtained off on one side.

The whole thing was an act of witness which cannot have failed to move many to a new or renewed devotion to the sacred Passion of our Saviour. I doubt if a more fitting or beautiful setting for such a drama could be found in the world.

\* \* \*

### Gwelo, Southern Rhodesia

From a letter:

"One piece of work with which I have been concerned here, was the production of a seventeenth-century Mystery Play by the Spanish dramatist Calderon translated into Shona, the local vernacular). We produced the play at a Roman Catholic Mission, where all the Europeans and Africans together had built a vast open-air amphitheatre seating more than 2,000 people.

"The whole thing was a wonderful experience both for me and for the Africans (some 150 were in the cast). It brought life and meaning to some of the great eternal truths—especially the Golden Rule. The stage represents the world and Heaven. The Master summons seven actors to represent mankind. He assigns parts according to their capabilities. They are free to choose how they will act, with the assistance of the Law, and at the end the Master judged each according to his performance, rewarding or punishing him accordingly.

"It is exciting to see how closely—on occasion—Missions of different denominations and also lay people work in together out here."

M. I. GORDON.

\* \* \*

### Grace Benton

A monoplay is a unique form of theatre which is neither a sketch nor a monologue. Only one person appears, acting only one part, yet the other characters are conceived as real, live people. Grace Benton was commissioned to write this play: the result is a tremendous advance on the usual missionary drama, for the author has skilfully avoided both preaching and sentimentality, and has set out to shew how Christianity is spread by ordinary people who deliberately give their lives to the propagation of the Faith.

The principal character in *No Right to Roses*, Ellen Holdfast, is a woman of simple courage: she and her husband have been Translator - Missionaries among the Kisega people in East Africa; their houseboy has been killed by terrorists and her husband died shortly after the incident. Ellen, not well, retires to England and finds that she has an incurable disease and only two years, or less, to live: she intends to use her little capital to buy a cottage in which to live on her small pension. Then she remembers the dying words of her houseboy: "TEACH THEM, memsa'b, TEACH THEM TRUE: THEY LIKE CHILDREN: THEY NOT KNOW TO BE GOOD". But how to teach the Kisega? The New Testament in their tongue is not yet fully translated, the Mission is closed, and she alone has the knowledge to complete the translation.

Ellen does not buy her cottage, instead she arranges with an old friend,

Marion Bond, to share her flat in East Africa, where she can continue to translate while her precious two years run their course. Her capital pays her fare, and when the play opens we find her on board the Union-Castle liner sailing to East Africa. What happens on board ship, and how events alter her plans, and change the lives of some of the people she meets on board, is what the play shows.

An informed critic writes: "Two long scenes, sustained by a single actress, is something of a *tour de force*, and Grace Benton succeeds; only a good voice, which she has, would be equal to such a demand. The acting is careful and good: the deck tilts ever so slightly; breezes spring up; the water is deep all round; the weather changes; people come from different places and go in different ways, all consistently and without exaggeration. The "Bad attack" of the dread, but unspecified disease is an ambitious effort and holds the audience's sympathy.

The play is coherent, dignified and serious—possibly a little too serious. There is a child who provides some light relief, but chiefly he too shews up what a very good woman Ellen Holdfast is. That the unseen characters are types without subsidiary characteristics is unavoidable, considering the limitation of the form. This play is a feat of ingenuity, memory and self-rehearsal, and well worth going to see and hear."

Information concerning the performance of *No Right to Roses*, or other monoplays in Grace Benton's repertoire, may be obtained through the Religious Drama Society.

N. N.

\* \* \*

### Muswell Hill, London

"Tetherdown Players" gave two performances in November last of Andre Obey's *Noah*—our most ambitious presentation so far in our religious drama history. *Noah* captured its potential cast at Tetherdown eighteen months ago when we read it "with a view" to production, and we waited a year for our *Noah*. When we at last became immersed in rehearsals we became depressed, bounced up again, and eventually limped to the first night in fear and trembling. No people were more surprised than producer, actors and stage staff when at both performances the audiences received us with acclaim. The point is—we knew we were not

nearly as good as all these kind people were saying, and we waited, with keen interest, for the criticism we had been promised by David William who had said helpfully come to see our production. What he gave us was, of course, very different, and it was as well we had not lost our heads! But it was stimulating and constructive, and we felt he had paid us the compliment of an honest and serious criticism which we can use for the future.

We were fortunate also in having the help of Ursula Nicholl who came to three of our early rehearsals and took us for exercises in movement and mime. Much that was good in the production came from this, and for amateur groups who have little or no experience of this kind of "jerks" we get up to at the Summer Schools I can recommend a dose of such tuition. It was most heartening to see the difference it made in such a short time; players who had never thought they could "make fools of themselves" lost their self-consciousness and entered into the real joy of it with vitality and gaiety.

I think we have learnt quite a bit from this production, and to Ursula Nicholl and David William we want to say very sincere "thank you".

P. T.

\* \* \*

### Oxford

University Players in Pusey House Chapel.

Vigour was the keynote of this robust production, *The Miracles*, and the nobility was struck boldly at the opening words of the play "Hail, Mary!" which rang out from the splendid figure of Gabriel high up on the rood screen. Mary responded in a peasant-shrill voice with a mocking incredulity which changed to glad acceptance. Joseph followed, peasant and a clown, playing to the audience with a comic relish evoking peals of laughter which echoed upward into the chapel's vaulted roof from packed audience of uninhibited undergraduates. *The Miracles* sped on with an earthy strength and a sense of broad and lively comedy in the first part, which in the second part swept up to a moving and impressive climax. Here the "sense of wonder," which was lacking in the Nativity scenes, could not fail to emerge as the drama of the Crucifixion and Resurrection was unfolded. The human story of Christ was presented with

simplicity, sincerity and dignity while the divine and miraculous elements were played down, and the part of Mary was allowed to shrink into insignificance.

The actual moments of the Nativity and the Resurrection were not climactic and took place in a corner and one could have wished for more light upon Gabriel at the Resurrection. At these and other moments opportunities for dramatic contrast were sacrificed to speed. But the realism of the Crucifixion was unforgettable and the final appearance of the risen Christ up on the rood screen above a vast crowd of kneeling people each holding a lighted taper was deeply impressive. The production by John Duncan had a style and strong individuality of its own. It was Mediaeval, and yet definitely "contemporary", and seemed to reflect something of the spirit and atmosphere of the plays of Arden, Wesker and Kops. The mediaeval peasant reached across the centuries to link hands with the "ordinary" people of 1960. The whole occasion was a remarkable achievement. The play was composed of extracts from the York, Townley, Coventry and Chester Cycles, re-translated and adapted from the Middle English texts by members of the University Players. It was in effect a "fillet" of mystery play, in which the literary might regret some of the omissions, but it was obviously filleted to suit the stomachs of a young contemporary audience, who in fact packed Pusey House Chapel at every performance for a week, which was justification for the experiment.

This production was an exciting and stimulating experience and was a significant step in the development of modern religious drama. It should be seen again.

FRANCES MACKENZIE,

*Principal of Training Dept., British Drama League.*

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### Portsmouth

St. Michael's Theatre Club's Christmas production included *Nicholas '59*, described as "a Christian satire with music" of which the author writes:

"Inspired by John Hester's review of *Expresso Bongo* in *Christian Drama*, I set out to explore the possibilities of satire as a vehicle for Christian drama. Using three well known legends of St. Nicholas, and including a number of

songs, *Nicholas '59* is an attempt at satirical comment on certain aspects of twentieth-century society, from a Christian angle.

"Nicholas returns to earth, and visits, first, a factory, where he revives three schoolboys who have been sucked into the machine with the raw materials and turned into babies' dummies. Shattered but not daunted by Soho, he then tries to rescue three young ladies from a house of ill-fame, but is grieved to discover they have no wish to be rescued. He decides to return to his former diocese of Myra, and on board ship meets an old lady on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, a typical Christian doing her best in a rather perplexing world. The ship is blown up, and they find themselves back on 'the heavenly shore'."

A member of one audience writes:

"This play will cause many people to raise their eyebrows—indeed it may even shock some of the older members of an audience, in its attempt to apply Christian principles to the seamier side of twentieth-century life. The visit of a Bishop to a factory and a house of ill-fame is certainly a very daring theme, and yet surely as Christians our concern should be for *all* sorts and conditions of men. We fail in our Christian duty towards our neighbour if we adopt a 'holier than thou' attitude, and feel no concern for those whose way of life we might consider to be less 'respectable' than our own. This play may shock some, but it will deepen the concern of others. It illustrates admirably the materialistic outlook of the present age, and helps us to decide what we as Christians can do about it."

\* \* \*

### Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia

*Go Down Moses* is an intriguing play.

It is ingenious in its story pattern and original in its dramatic approach. In the end, however, the playwright, Philip J. Lamb, failed because he tried to say too much. There was the narrative of the Journey, the moral of Good and Evil, and then a projection into the coming of our Lord. This final idea was good, but did not strike home with full dramatic effect, probably because the author was by this time verbally punch-drunk.

However, there is no doubt that the Cathedral Players succeeded in staging an effective and provocative production,

for which all credit must go to Kate Crawley. Here was simplicity and sensitivity, but with a positive approach. Movements were incisive and grouping design never intruded. The atmosphere was captured early in the play, and in this the appropriate music played an important part. It was a pity that the tape recorder operators were so much in evidence that they were almost on stage. Within the limitations the lighting was effective, but more colour should have been used, particularly on stage. I wonder if it was necessary to have quite so many wires strung up and down and across? Couldn't they have been a little less conspicuous? They were in as much evidence as the operator—so often the actors bade us look stage left, and there was an immaculate white shirt climbing on the cloister wall and switching lights on and off. I don't want to carp, but these details detract from the final polish which was so well achieved in the production generally.

We all have our own images of the Biblical figures. Mine came out of an enormous illustrated Children's Bible, and I now refuse to change my pictures. Satan is diabolical, the Archangel is magnificent, and Moses has a beard. In this play the characterisations could all have been drawn in bolder strokes. Good and Evil were reasonable members of a twentieth-century debating society, instead of the reasons of all time. Moses made up his obvious lack of technical ability by his complete sincerity. His movements of doubt were most effective. It was perhaps unfair to give this monumental part to someone so inexperienced, but it appears that in this production no challenge was too great. In most cases the voices lacked enough projection to overcome the undoubtedly difficulties and challenge of the Cloisters acoustics, although its stark, dignified setting undoubtedly helped the atmosphere of the play. Costumes were extremely good, with the exception of the rather odd appearance of a paisley shawl on one character!

The outstanding points of this production were undoubtedly the sincerity of the players and their intelligent appreciation of the characters they portrayed—as a result its impact on the audience was considerable. And this is the making of all good theatre.

L. S. H.

### Sheffield

Three performances of a new play *The Sample* by James Brabazon, were given last December at St. Mary's Community Centre, Bramall Lane, Sheffield.

The Christian Community Players, the company inaugurated in Sheffield by Miss Pamela Keily, are produced in this play by Martyn Colborn, Assistant Adviser in Religious Drama in the Northern Province.

*The Sample* makes a departure from the kind of work mostly attempted by these players; it is neither a Biblical tableau nor a poetic fantasy, but a perfectly prosaic and homely fable of ordinary people in a realistic domestic setting.

Mother, daughter, and grandmother, with the girl's soldier fiancé, display the normal family affections and family frictions, until they are visited by a door-to-door salesman with his "Good Book" and religious pictures.

He receives a mixed reception, and indeed his own convictions seem non too sound but he is able to inspire the girl with faith and strength to support her in a time of trial and drudgery.

This simple message is presented in terms which make little demand on the players' technique, beyond that of the ordinary one-act play; but for those who prefer plain bread-and-butter it may well prove as acceptable as some of the more imaginative works which we have seen under these auspices.

It contains some convincing and often humorous characterisation, and it is very well acted by the small team of anonymous players.

W.

(By permission of the  
"Sheffield Telegraph".)

\* \* \*

### Southampton

The cradle of the drama in Europe rested upon the altar, and the first noteworthy stage in the development of our theatre was marked by the performance of "mysteries" and "miracles" in the churches.

Last night a beautiful production of a Nativity play, *The True Mystery of the Nativity*—adapted and translated by James Kirkup from a four-day cycle written by two fifteenth-century French clerics—evoked most effectively the spirit of the Middle Ages, in costume and presentation and in music and setting.

The company presenting the "mystery" ("as an act of worship in preparation for the season of Christmas") were the Wayfarers Dramatic Society and the place of performance the Church of the Ascension, Bitterne Park, Southampton.

With great taste and artistry the events preceding and immediately following the birth of Christ are depicted—from the departure of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem to the visit of the "Orient kings".

The company tried to keep to the original manner of presentation by the use of medieval costumes (in Botticelli style) and traditional carols.

The short, sharp scenes were enacted on a raised platform around the church's lovely new chancel screen, but use of the aisles and nave were made for exits and entrances, lanterns casting enormous shadows upon the walls and the final procession of the entire cast carrying candles making a striking conclusion.

The actors were, like their admirable producer, anonymous; but each portrayal was most reverently, movingly and poetically done.

Truly, this production—presented at the church as part of the parish's diamond jubilee celebrations—was a triumph of colour, song and the spoken word. And the illumination of the figure of Christ on the church's beautiful Cross for just a brief instance added a perfect "finis".

J. E. M.

(Reproduced by permission of the "*Southern Evening Echo*" (Southern Newspapers, Ltd.), Southampton.)

\* \* \*

### Wesley's Chapel, London

*Pray for a Wind* was written by Morwenna Bielby for the Huddersfield Branch of the Religious Drama Society in 1958, and later, was published by the Epworth Press. In December I saw it produced by Wesley's Chapel Drama Group.

It was a lively production and there was no doubt but that the audience was caught up in the play and much moved by it. A great deal of study must have gone into it, for the theme was understood and clearly brought out. The quick transition from one episode to another may set many a problem to the producer, yet it gives scope for endless variety of mood and movement, and Margaret Smith accepted this challenge with obvious relish. She showed imagination and skill in her production plan, and thoroughness in working it out.

The costumes were attractive, and the music, which I gather had been specially composed, played an important part in the creation of atmosphere.

The acting had vitality; the women on the whole showing more skill than the men, and outweighing them rather drastically; but the principal parts of John Wesley and Grace Murray carried the play with confidence.

In my opinion, this is the best play that Mrs. Bielby has yet written. She has tackled the difficult problem of telescoping the life of John Wesley into three short acts, and she has done so by the device of a chorus, by the use of naturalistic and stylised episodes, and by alternating between prose and free verse. Thus we are enabled to enter into the lives of the Wesley family and the eighteenth-century world around them, to feel deep compassion for their suffering and to enjoy their moments of gaiety. We learn something of the character of this man of God who, in spite of great personal suffering and deadness of soul, became the tool through whom the wind of the Spirit could blow till the smouldering ashes of eighteenth-century Christianity blazed into a fire and the Church became alive once more.

The last chorus of the play challenges each one of us to pray for a wind, for the breath of that same Spirit to kindle our hearts with the fire of His love.

Here is a play worth studying, worth producing and worth going to see. We look forward to more plays from this writer.

CARINA ROBINS.

\* \* \*

### New York

Mr. E. Martin Browne began the new 1959-60 season of religious drama at Union Theological Seminary, New York, with a production of *Thomas Crammer of Canterbury* by Charles Williams, in December last. This fascinating and complex verse play was received with appreciation by audiences and critics (including Arthur Gelb of the *New York Times*) who felt that the production had successfully surmounted the difficulties of the play and engaged the sympathy of the spectators. We hope to print a fuller report later.

The next event on schedule is said to be a revue, with skits and songs, expressing "man's longing for more ultimate securities than society affords".

# MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

October 31st, 1959

The Annual General Meeting of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain was held at 10.45 a.m. on Saturday, October 31st, 1959, at the Y.M.C.A., Great Russell Street, London, W.C. 1. Mrs. K. M. Baxter was in the chair. The meeting opened with prayers led by The Rev. Dr. J. Bachman.

1. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, held on November 1st, 1958, were confirmed.

2. Apologies for absence were received from:

|                                  |
|----------------------------------|
| Miss Sadie Aitken, Edinburgh     |
| Mrs. G. K. A. Bell, Canterbury   |
| Dame Dorothy Brock, Tankerton    |
| Miss D. M. Budd, Warlingham      |
| R. Burnell, Esq., Melton Mowbray |
| Miss Diana Carroll, High Wycombe |
| Albert Chubb, Esq., Launceston   |
| Rev. A. E. Cordell, London       |
| Miss Heather Craig, Malvern Link |
| Miss Muriel Crane, Hull          |
| Miss Mary Forbes, Brighton       |
| Rev. Frank Glendenning, London   |
| Miss Evelyn Hart, Salisbury      |

|                                     |
|-------------------------------------|
| Rev. J. Hester, London              |
| Miss Margaret Hodgetts, Watford     |
| Very Rev. Walter Hussey, Chichester |
| Miss D. H. Joce, Leatherhead        |
| B. Kingsley, Esq., Warlingham       |
| Rev. Dr. I. Machin, Andover         |
| Miss Lyn Oxenford, London           |
| Mrs. M. A. Paterson, Camberley      |
| Miss Susan Pearson, Carnforth       |
| Alec Penn, Esq., Maryport           |
| A. Wyn Roberts, Esq., Wallasey      |
| Miss Sansom, Poplar                 |
| Rev. Robert Wiseman, Dagenham       |

3. Review of the Year, by the Chairman

Mrs. Baxter welcomed members to the meeting and conveyed greetings and good wishes from the Chairman of the Society Mr. E. Martin Browne and Mrs. Martin Browne, who were at Union Theological Seminary, New York, completing the course they inaugurated three years ago.

The Chairman reviewed the results of the appeal made to all members by letter: financially it was not an unqualified success, but it had ventilated the needs of the Society, and the response from some members had made the venture worthwhile. The critical state of the Society's finances, together with the tapering Rockefeller Grant, necessitated the introduction of certain economy measures: no "packets" would be issued after December 1959; a charge for packing as well as postage would be made on all books from the Library; and Summer School fees would be increased to meet rising costs.

The York Summer School was most successful, but rather big; because of this a plan to establish short Regional Courses was under discussion. The Summer School for 1960 was to be held at Culham College, Abingdon, and Miss Pamela Keily was to be director of studies: gratitude was expressed to the Committee of the Northern Province for releasing Miss Keily to undertake this work.

It was with enormous regret that Mrs. Baxter announced that Mr. Raymond James had been obliged to resign his appointment as Youth Tutor, as a result of ill-health, and a sincere appreciation was given for the excellence of his work. The Youth Work was to be re-organised on a different basis, and Mrs. Nutman had agreed to become Youth Adviser. As an encouragement to young people to join the Society, a Junior Membership scheme had been adopted.

The Chairman stated that Branch Organisation had proved uneconomic, and that means of finding a solution to the problems were under discussion in consultation with Branch representatives.

The International Conference was to be held at Royaumont, a conference house near Paris, and was being organised by Miss Robins: delegates had been invited from many countries, including some behind the Iron Curtain.

Other achievements of the year included a continued increase in the number of books despatched by the Library; Theatre Group Productions had launched two ventures—*The Unquiet Journey* and *The Wooden Spoon*—and two new presentations were likely in the near future; three lectures on the Arts had been given in Central London as a result of a suggestion by Miss Pearce; the travelling exhibition, designed by Miss Pearce, was completed and a photographic copy had been made, and members were urged to make full use of this; a Christmas card, designed by Miss Patricia Lyle, had been printed, and sales had been very satisfactory; as a result of the Play Competition two prizes were awarded for the best scripts submitted; and the Handbook, edited by Mr. Raymond Chapman, was now on sale. The Chairman said she wished to offer the Council's special thanks to the Chaplains for their work during the year.

In conclusion, Mrs. Baxter thanked the staff of the Society for their work during the past year.

#### National Adviser's Report

The following summary of the work done by members of the tutorial staff and others, was then given:

##### TRAINING

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| November 1958 | Hornchurch, Week-end School. Hereford, one-day for teachers.  |
| February 1959 | Hook, Make-up session.  |
| April         | Wallasey, Week-end School.  |
| August        | Farnham, Mid-week School. Tonbridge, One-day School.  |
| August 18-27  | Gloucester, Youth Course.   |
| September     | SUMMER SCHOOL, NINE-DAY RESIDENTIAL COURSE, St. John's College, York.   |
| October       | Commonwealth, Rural Life Institute, Drama Section.  |
| December 1958 | Wallasey, One-day School, Townswomen's Guild. Muswell Hill Congregational Church, three sessions on movement. |
| January 1959  | Lincoln, Week-end Course, clergy and teachers. Mill Hill, Council of Churches, Week-end course on acting.     |

##### PRODUCTIONS

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| December 1958 | Southwark, demonstration of work of Cathedral Religious Drama Group. <i>Pray for a Wind</i> , M. Bielby. Producer, U. Nicholl. |
| March 1959    | Southwark Religious Drama Group. <i>Holy Family</i> , R. H. Ward. Producer, U. Nicholl.  |
| May 1959      | Mill Hill Council of Christian Churches. <i>Man on Trial</i> , Diego Fabbri. Producer, Carina Robins.                          |
| June          | Olympia Exhibition. <i>Road to Damascus</i> , Margaret Wood. Producer, U. Nicholl.   |

##### PLAYS, PAGEANTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS SEEN

Nineteen in the London area and twenty in the country, including Mirfield, Yorkshire, and Bury St. Edmunds.

##### TALKS, LECTURES, MEETINGS, VISITS

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| November 1958 | Strasbourg visit. London, City: Lunch-hour talks. St. Pancras, Youth Fellowship. Abingdon T.C. Cambridge Undergraduates. Tonbridge meeting.  |
| January 1959  | B.B.C. "Christian Outlook", discussion on Nativity Plays. Later, talk on Plays for Passiontide. B.B.C. Television Interview. Cambridge Undergraduates. York, St. John's College. Bishop of Kingston, meeting. Muswell Hill, meeting. |
| February      | Lewes, St. Michael's Parish. Tooting, All Saints. Deanery Players, Annual Dinner.  |
| March         | Cambridge, meeting with college chaplains. Bloomsbury Baptist. Tonbridge.  |
| April         | North Devon, Lecture tour arranged by Exeter University. Institute of Education. Leeds, Northern Province Drama Committee. Sevenoaks, Mothers' Union.  |

## CHRISTIAN DRAMA

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| May       | Guildford, visit Cathedral re Festival. Rochester, Bishop meeting. Hampstead, Holy Trinity. Bristol, Henley.                            |
| June      | London, City, two meetings. Tunbridge Wells. London B.D. two occasions.   |
| July      | London A.C.U. Annual Meeting and Service. Didcot. Oxford Conference.  |
| August    | Royaumont, France, visit.   |
| September | London, Standing Conference Drama Associations. London Course for Teachers. Southend, Drama Guild.                                      |
| October   | Sussex, Branch A.G.M. London, Spurgeon's Theological College, Baptist. Mill Hill, Union Church. Beddington, Ruislip Decanal Conference. |

### ACTIVITIES ARRANGED BY R.D.S. AND UNDERTAKEN BY OUTSIDE TUTORS AND LECTURERS

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| November 1958 | North Greenford, All Hallows Religious Drama Group, taught by Jessie Powell.   |
| April-May     | London. Series of three lectures on the Arts. Speakers: Dr. of Chichester, Mr. Austin Wright, Mr. John Fernald. Followed by outing to John Piper's studio. |
| May           | Belfast, Religious Drama Festival and Week-end School. Tutor and adjudicator, Harold Bennett.  |
| From October  | Finsbury, weekly Religious Drama Class, arranged by L.C. Tutor, Alan Wilson.   |

### BRANCHES AND REGIONS

A full report on the work of the Branches had been circulated to each member present.

Miss Robins spoke of the difficulties of building up the strength of the Society in the provinces; that it seemed we were working in too much isolation from the Churches instead of being accepted as a part of the Church. She thought that Area Representatives were probably needed, if we could find and train such people.

### 5. Report from the Northern Province

Miss Keily was able to report a successful year, especially in the number of new plays which had emerged. These included: *Birth by Drowning* by Norman Nicholson—first produced by Miss Keily in Mirfield Quarry on Commemoration Day, and a second production was to take place in the Lesser Free Trade Hall, Manchester, in December 1959; *Jeremiah*, a musical written for use in youth clubs; *One Member Suffer* written by the Rev. R. E. C. Browne in Manchester, and which was awarded one of the two prizes in the Competition; and a duologue by R. Ward, for presentation by Miss Keily and Mr. Martyn Colborn as an alternative to talks on Religious Drama.

Miss Keily had undertaken a number of productions—in Billingham, Sheffield, Stockton and Mirfield—and would be based on Manchester until Easter 1960, after that in Sheffield.

Mr. Martyn Colborn, a former member of the New Pilgrim Players, had been engaged on a one-year contract by the Committee in the Northern Province and was working on four productions in Sheffield, including *The Trial of Jimmy Brown*, which proved the most satisfactory play in relation to the problem of Christian Communication.

In conclusion, Miss Keily made the point that fear of error was a real danger in progress in the difficult job of presenting Religious Drama.

### 6. Amendment to the Rules of the Society

In accordance with the notice given, it was moved by the Chairman on behalf of the Council, and seconded by Mr. Trustram that:

I. Rule 4(b) of the Rules of the Society shall be amended to read:

“(b) All subscriptions shall be payable on election and thereafter in advance on 1st October in each year provided that for any member elected after the first day of August in any year the first period shall be deemed to run to 1st October in the succeeding year.”

Carried *Nem. Con.*

## II. Rule 5 be amended by the addition of sub-clause (g) as follows:

"(g) The Council may co-opt not more than five additional members who will be full members of the Council with the power to vote."

Carried *Nem. Con.*

## 7. Elections

As there had been only one nomination in each case, the Chairman declared the following elected unopposed:

*The Chairman of the Society:* E. Martin Browne, Esq., C.B.E.

*Honorary Treasurer:* J. H. L. Trustram, Esq., M.B.E.

*Auditors:* Messrs. Ridley, Heslop and Sainer.

*Council:* The election for the Council was then held, the following twenty-seven being nominated for twenty places:

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| *Rev. R. Ayres           | *James Forsyth, Esq.                            |
| *Miss K. Bainbridge-Bell | *Rev. Frank Glendenning                         |
| *Mrs. K. M. Baxter       | *Rev. Gordon Hewitt                             |
| Rev. Anthony Bridge      | Miss K. Hudson                                  |
| Mrs. Mary Bull           | *Rev. Dr. Alan Kay                              |
| *Rev. P. Bullock-Flint   | *Miss Frances Mackenzie                         |
| *Raymond Chapman, Esq.   | Mrs. A. Pattison Muir                           |
| *Miss Freda Collins      | Miss Jessie Powell                              |
| *Rev. A. E. Cordell      | *Miss Henzie Raeburn<br>(Mrs. E. Martin Browne) |
| *John Dalby, Esq.        | *Graham Suter, Esq.                             |
| Rev. Eric Devenport      | *Rev. Philip Turner                             |
| Miss Cicely Deverill     | Oliver Wilkinson, Esq.                          |
| *Rev. Robert Duce.       | David William, Esq.                             |
| James Roose-Evans, Esq.  |   |

An asterisk denoting a retiring member who was nominated for re-election.

Tellers were appointed, and whilst they were counting the votes the meeting proceeded with the business.

## 8. Matters of current importance

(a) Mr. Christopher le Fleming asked that more attention should be given to music in *Christian Drama*, and that more use should be made of his services as Honorary Adviser to the Society. Mr. le Fleming mentioned four items of importance: *Noye's Fludde*, *Daniel*, *The Carmelites*, and Ralph Vaughan Williams' *The First Nowell*.

(b) Mrs. Norma Nutman spoke on matters relating to the Youth Work of the Society, emphasising the following: the valuable beginnings in Youth Drama by Mr. Raymond James, the necessity for wise spending of the grant given by the King George's Jubilee Trust; the prime importance of integrating the young people into the main body of the Society, and the natural interest of young people in religion and in Drama as a means of expression, which made the possibilities of useful work in this field of inestimable value.

The meeting then adjourned for lunch in the Reception Room. Most members availed themselves of the luncheon arrangements made by the Society.

## 9. Result of Election

On resumption after lunch the Chairman announced that the following had been elected to the Council for the ensuing year:

|                         |                        |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Rev. R. Ayres           | James Forsyth, Esq.    |
| Miss K. Bainbridge-Bell | Rev. Frank Glendenning |
| Mrs. K. M. Baxter       | Miss K. Hudson         |
| Rev. Anthony Bridge     | Rev. Dr. Alan Kay      |
| Rev. P. Bullock-Flint   | Miss Frances Mackenzie |
| Raymond Chapman, Esq.   | Miss Jessie Powell     |
| Miss Freda Collins      | Miss Henzie Raeburn    |
| Rev. A. E. Cordell      | Graham Suter, Esq.     |
| John Dalby, Esq.        | Rev. Philip Turner     |
| James Roose-Evans, Esq. | David William, Esq.    |

**10. Consideration of the Society's Accounts**

The Honorary Treasurer, Mr. J. H. L. Trustram, in reviewing the year's accounts drew attention to the deficit on the year's operations of £797. In view of this financial position Mr. Trustram gave details of the economies mentioned by the Chairman in her opening remarks. A special appeal was made for those who had been paying £1. 11s. 6d. per annum for subscription and "packets" to consider continuing the 10s. 6d. as a donation to the Society.

The Chairman at this point said that to counteract the unhappy situation, she had much pleasure in announcing that three people had given donations totalling £300 for the specific purpose of meeting costs incurred in connection with the Library, and in recognition and appreciation of this valuable service, Mrs. Baxter expressed a hope that other members might feel inclined to give donations, small or large, for similar special purposes.

Discussion then followed on the Treasurer's Report and several useful suggestions were made and would be considered by the incoming Council.

At this stage the Chairman welcomed General Hare, of the King George's Jubilee Trust.

Before the formal business of the meeting concluded the Rev. R. Ayres thanked the Chairman most warmly for her outstanding services to the Society, and for her happy management of the meeting.

**DEMONSTRATIONS OF YOUTH DRAMA**

Demonstrations were then given by the Youth Group from the Church of the Ascension, Preston Road, Wembley, and Mr. Alan Garrard's Youth Group. These two items were greatly appreciated, and all those who had taken part remained to have tea with the members of the Society.

**THEATRE PARTY**

In the evening a number of members joined the three theatre parties which had been arranged by the Society.

**PATRON OF THE SOCIETY**

His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury

**OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY*****Vice-Presidents:***

The President of the Baptist Union.

Dame Dorothy Brock, D.B.E.

The Rt. Rev. F. A. Cockin, L.D.

The Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales.

Dr. H. P. van Dusen, President of the Union Theological Seminary, New York.

T. S. Eliot, Esq., O.M.

The Rt. Rev. G. A. Ellison, Lord Bishop of Chester, President of the Actors' Church Union.

The Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council.

Christopher Fry, Esq.

The Rt. Rev. L. S. Hunter, D.D., Lord Bishop of Sheffield.

Sir Barry Jackson.

Rt. Hon. Lord Luke, T.D., D.L.

Herbert Malden, Esq.

The President of the Methodist Conference.

George Odey, Esq., O.B.E., M.P.

The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of England.

The British Commissioner of the Salvation Army.

The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

Miss Athene Seyler.

Robert Speaight, Esq.

Dame Sybil Thorndike, D.B.E.

Miss E. Younghusband.

*Chairman:* E. Martin Browne, Esq., C.B.E.

*Chairman of Council:* Mrs. K. M. Baxter.

*Hon. Treasurer:* John H. L. Trustram, Esq., M.B.E.

*Hon. Advisers:* Art: Miss S. M. Pearce      Music: C. le Fleming, Esq.

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